

March – Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

STATISTICS

- Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related death in Michigan, with only lung cancer taking the lives of more men and women.
- During 2003, 2,709 men and 2,710 women in Michigan were diagnosed with colorectal cancer.
- In 2004, 940 men and 932 women in Michigan died from colorectal cancer.
- Both men and women develop colorectal cancer and die from it.
- Michigan ranks 31st in the nation in colorectal cancer deaths.

RISK FACTORS

There are several factors that increase one's risk of developing colorectal cancer. These include:

- Increasing age
- A personal history of colon cancer, colon polyps, or inflammatory bowel disease
- A family history of colorectal cancer
- Being a Jew of Eastern European descent
- A diet high in animal fats or low in fiber
- Not being physically active
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Heavy use of alcohol

SCREENING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Michigan Cancer Consortium recommends that men and women 50 years of age and older who are not at increased risk for colorectal cancer follow a screening schedule consisting of:

- A fecal occult blood test (testing for blood in stool) every year
OR
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy (a procedure to examine the lower portion of the colon) every 5 years
OR
- A fecal occult blood test every year AND flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 years
OR
- A colonoscopy (a procedure to examine the entire colon) every 10 years
OR
- A double-contrast barium enema (an X-ray of the colon) every 5 years

RESOURCES

American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org

Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation
www.preventcancer.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/cancer/screenforlife

Colon Cancer Alliance
www.ccalliance.org

Michigan Cancer Consortium
www.michigancancer.org

National Cancer Institute – Colon and Rectal Cancer
www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/colon-and-rectal

National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance
www.eifoundation.org/national/nccra/splash

National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable
www.nccrt.org

DISEASE BASICS

Colorectal cancer is the 2nd leading cause of cancer-related death in Michigan for men and women combined. Most colorectal cancers can be traced back to a polyp, a non-cancerous growth in the inner walls of the colon and rectum. The longer a polyp goes undetected, the greater the chance that it will become cancerous.

Who is at risk of developing colorectal cancer? Everyone. Men and women of all races are susceptible. The primary risk factor for colorectal cancer is increasing age, with more than 90% of cases being found in persons over the age of 50. A family history of colorectal cancer or pre-cancerous polyps also increases the risk of developing colorectal cancer.

At the disease's earliest stages, there are virtually no symptoms. As it progresses, changes to bowel movement patterns, bleeding, and abdominal discomfort may occur.

It is important to diagnose colorectal cancer early. With early diagnosis, treatment is possible and often successful. As the disease develops, it spreads through the large intestine and invades other organ systems. Survival from colorectal cancer is greatly decreased when the cancer has spread.

PREVENTION STRATEGIES

How can you stop colorectal cancer before it begins?

Step 1: Get Screened

- Have a fecal occult blood test every year.
OR
- Have a flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 years.
OR
- Have a fecal occult blood test every year AND flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 years.
OR
- Have a colonoscopy every 10 years.
OR
- Have a double-contrast barium enema every 5 years.

Step 2: Live healthy. Eat right and be active.

- Eat high fiber, low fat diets. Whole grains are a plus. Avoid the french fries.
- Kick the butt! Smokers are at higher risk of colorectal cancer.
- Walk your 10,000 steps a day. Being active is being healthy.

Family and personal history should be considered when determining screening options. If you are at an increased risk for colorectal cancer, screening should begin at an earlier age and be done more often.